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## HAS JUDAISM A FUTURE?

BY PROF. ABRAM S. ISAACS, EDITOR OF "THE JEWISH  
MESSENGER."

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It is difficult to secure a just and unbiased interpretation of Judaism as a modern religion, because the Jew who shares the honor of being included with priests, lawyers, and women in the capacious storehouse of uncomplimentary popular proverbs, is treated either with superlative praise or superlative condemnation. The want of due proportion in the estimate in both cases leads to faulty generalizing and gross injustice. For the Jew is neither angel nor fiend, but a profoundly human animal with all the defects and virtues, original and acquired, that are common to mankind, "Jew and Gentile, bond and free." Perhaps on the whole his enemies have done less harm than his friends. People like to be agreeably disappointed. It is pleasant to realize that the average Jew is certainly no fiend; and it is always more or less of a shock to discover that our idol is necessarily of clay. The Jew, then, is neither a Daniel Deronda nor a Fagin, neither a Shylock nor a Nathan.

That the Jew is treated as a rule with a prejudice which either exaggerates or distorts the truth, is due almost wholly to the amazing popular ignorance of his history and religion—an ignorance which unhappily is not confined to caricaturists in the comic weeklies or playwrights who revel in hooked noses and flashy jewellery as essentially Hebrew characteristics. Even to Thomas Carlyle, Judaism is simply a religion of "old clothes." So cultured and refined a critic as Goldwin Smith seems as much irritated when he touches upon the Jew as was Haman when he saw Mordecai at the gate. It would be harsh to say that the Jew is made a man of straw, a kind of theological scarecrow, dating from the early centuries, and sent adrift down the ages as a per-

petual object-lesson in irreligion, contumacy, formalism, greed, to guileless children of light, who give him an extra kick two now and then, to keep themselves in practice, and satisfy their disingenuous piety. But is the charge without historic basis ?

Practically, the Jew who serves the nineteenth century moral and adorns its tale is the Jew of Gospel records—the Pharisee of the Pharisees, with all the reputed and none of the reputable traits of his class. If he is referred to in sermons and hymns, he is still the Jew of the New Testament. It is Caiaphas and Judas Iscariot who are his representative men. He is a Palestinian, wears broad phylacteries, and utters ghastly imprecations on his enemies in a language which can be understood only by the sacred few. Let him be anathema.

If the Jew, then, is so caricatured, need it excite surprise that Judaism receives as scanty justice ? It, too, is relegated to the past, to the lumber-room of antiquities. It is to be exhibited in a Semitic museum, forsooth, with the fossils and remains of primitive religions. Its rites and ceremonies are to be illustrated in glass cases for the special delectation of candidates for the ministry. It is to be dissected and analyzed for the benefit of students of comparative philology. It can be made to furnish interesting data in the fields of ethnography and anthropology. In one word, it can be tolerated as a skeleton or a corpse, but not as a living organism. It may be granted a past, but no present can be admitted and no future dare be insisted upon.

The Jew pleads for justice, not for glorification. His critics should cease to view him with the telescope, as if he were an occupant of another sphere. Let them abandon their microscope as well, in their fondness to detect the most minute defects, and lay aside favorite spectacles through which only their own mental strabismus can be discerned. Let them judge the Jew as he is. Let them study Judaism as it is. They will discover that both are very much alive. The time is past for labelling Judaism as pre-historic or the Jew as belonging to the extinct civilizations of the East, with the Phœnicians, Hittites, and the rest. Call him an arrested development, if you like ; a survival, an anachronism. He has survived, because, numerically weak, he has been spiritually strong. He has resisted his environment with all of his contradictions and limitations ; he has withstood with heroic endurance opposing forces and he withstands them still. The

very methods adopted to extirpate him have been his salvation. The weapons forged against him, strange to say, have been his protection. In losing Palestine, he gained the universe. He was denationalized to become an international and cosmopolitan. The Orient was only one phase of his history. Just as the Babylonian captivity cured him forever of idolatry, his world-wandering is teaching him the universal spirit which is at the basis of Jewish prophetism. The remedy was radical, because the disease had reached its crisis and heroic measures were imperative.

It is an egregious blunder to consider Jewish history synonymous with Biblical history. The Old Testament tells simply of Jewish beginnings. The greater Jewish exodus did not end with the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. That historic migration still continues. The Hebrew, as the name etymologically suggests, is the emigrant of history—from the time of Abraham to our own age the movement continues. What is occurring in Russia, the landslides in recent decades from Germany, Poland, Roumania, this is but a grim repetition of the long series of migrations that mark every century. It is Persia in one epoch, Egypt in another, Italy and Greece in their turn, then Arab and Christian Spain, Central Europe, England, France, all links in an endless chain. Yet, despite the constant shifting of condition and environment, there were many breathing spells for the Jew when he could prove hammer as well as anvil, and become more than a silent factor in the world's advancement. The story of the Jew's influence on civilization, the record of his services in the arts and sciences, in literature, music, philosophy, and statecraft, is still to be written. The brief monograph of Schleiden requires to be supplemented by a more pretentious work of wider range.

If the critic of Judaism desires to gauge that religion accurately, he must familiarize himself with the history of the Jew in every land; he must follow the devious windings of his record East and West. He must account for that marvellous vitality which has been his preservative, and the unexampled adaptiveness which made the Jew at home, whether he saw the Guadalquivir or the Vistula at his feet, the Thames or the Euphrates, amid the orange groves of Sicily or the plains of Arabia—an adaptiveness which he still displays as settler in Australia, South

Africa, or the Argentine. The critical inquirer, too, should ascertain the Jew's record in the lands of his dispersion and his relation to the state, however insecure his right of domicile. Did the Jew originally seek a Ghetto, or was it not an enforced seclusion as if he were contamination and needed to be kept aloof from the rest of mankind? Did the Jew avoid society and mingle only with his special clan, or was not that exclusiveness fostered and maintained by civil and ecclesiastical enactment? Was the Jew always a dealer in old clo', a money lender, the pawnbroker of humanity? The French Crémieux and James Darmesteter, the English George Jessel and Moses Montefiore, the Dutch Godefroi and Josef Israels, the German Edward Lasker and Berthold Auerbach, the Russian Rubinstein and Antokolski, George Brandes in Denmark, Luigi Luzzati in Italy, Emma Lazarus in America, are names of our time, who are but successors of illustrious leaders centuries ago in varied fields, Jews who served the state under caliph, king, and pontiff, who aided powerfully in the revival of learning, the discoveries of science, in the dissemination of knowledge and literature. The true student of Jewish history, too, must become acquainted with the inner life of the Jew and the story of the synagogue's development, its devotional and intellectual range, the growth and ramification of Jewish law and custom, which became burden and blessing both, a crown as well as a yoke.

If his inquiry has been genuine, the critic will realize that the Jew's history, far from having ended when the temple fell and Jerusalem became *Ælia Capitolina*, has been and is still a continuous record. If the study has been thorough and not superficial, it will be found that Judaism, too, has been in constant growth and change, and is in itself a striking illustration of the theory of evolution. Whatever views one may hold of the composition of the Old Testament and the respective dates of its books, to speak of the prophetism of the patriarchs is as much an anachronism as to refer to the rabbinism of Moses or the Judaism of the Judges. One must be prepared to admit distinct phases in the history and development of Judaism, from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to Ezra, from Ezra to Jochanan ben Zaccai, who founded the school from which Talmudism sprang; from the sages of the Talmud to the mediæval rabbis with whom the rabbinical era began; from Maimonides and his successors with the

development of local codes and customs, which became the orthodoxy of their age, to Mendelssohn, the forerunner of a new epoch, contemporary with the French Revolution on the one hand and the birth of the American republic on the other. Judaism is thus a growth, not an instantaneous creation. The marvellous changes it has witnessed from the day when the Israelites received the olden tabernacle, with its minutiae of worship, to its latest developments in cultured lands of our time, are but forecasts, perhaps, of greater changes to come.

What, then, of Judaism's future? What will be its final phase, after the travail of ages, the crucifixion of the centuries? Surely the solution of the Jewish problem cannot be the dissolution of Judaism, the total absorption of the Jew by the nations, his abrupt disappearance from the field. Leaving out of the question all theological prejudices, and facing the problem as students of history, the Jew's persistence on the stage of human effort, despite ten thousand odds, is not likely to weaken as the ages advance. He has more factors in his favor than ever before. The world has grown. It is ceasing to be a battle-ground of the creeds, which are slowly becoming lines, not walls. Ugly hatreds and prejudices still are held, but the borderland of the religions is widening day by day, as their agreements, not differences, are kept in view.

The ultimate phase of Judaism baffles inquiry as much as the ultimate phase of human progress. Two opinions, both purely speculative, may be given here. Each is stoutly advocated, with proof-texts in abundance. The one sees the future of Judaism in a rehabilitated Jewish state, with Jerusalem its capital, which shall prove a court of arbitration for the nations, thus diffusing peace and happiness throughout the universe even as the sparks of the sacrificial offerings fly upward. The other finds the future of Judaism not in the absorption of the Jew by the nations, but in the absorption of the nations by the Jew, the thorough permeating of mankind by the spirit of Judaism, as manifested successively by Christianity, Mohammedanism, and the religion of those who recognize God, virtue, and immortality. It claims that the tendency in all modern faiths is toward unity, simplicity, and purification; that as the process continues with the widening of the suns the nations will slip off their theologies and theogonies and derive more comfort from the prophet than from the casuist.

If in the final outcome all forms of faiths disappear and a new combination arises, the law of the conservation of spiritual forces must still hold sway, and not one jot or tittle of the inspiration in the Testaments that have impelled mankind to righteousness will ever be lost. The resultant religion will not be different in spirit to the declaration of the Pentateuch, which is voiced by the Christian Gospel and finds its echo in the bibles of many creeds: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." When the nations shall have reached the heights of perfect brotherhood, Judaism's future will have dawned. It will cheerfully lay down its shield and sword, its rod and staff. The end of religions will have come in the birth of religion !

ABRAM S. ISAACS.